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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, June 18, 1937.

Subject: "BERRIES, - WILD AND TAME." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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It looks like a good summer for all kinds of berries, both wild and tame. This was the gist of a news story sent out recently from the Department of Agriculture in Washington.

A good berry year! I don't know what memories that phrase brings up to your mind. But for me it calls up a whole flock of recollections! Dewy mornings spent in the garden getting berries for Mother to make into jam. Hot summer afternoons when groups of us children were off with our pails to look for wild berries. We'd come back hot and dusty with long scratches on our bare arms and legs. But we had our berries! Which meant more nickles and dimes for our pig banks!

Well, energetic children this summer ought to have little difficulty getting cash for pink ice cream and merry-go-round rides. For berries promise to be more plentiful than they've been in years. Not just a few kinds of berries - but practically all of them: blackberries and blueberries, huckleberries and gooseberries, loganberries and thimbleberries, youngberries and raspberries, elderberries and currants. All are flourishing.

So today I have some tips for you as to buying berries, caring for them after you've bought them, and ways to use them in pies, cakes, and the like.

As most of you already know, the quality of a berry - any berry - is indicated by a bright, clean, fresh appearance. Berries should be plump - well filled out and of a solid color. You can't expect good flavor from berries which are partly green or off-color. If the berries look dull, have lost their bloom - they are over-ripe. Leaky berries should also warn you of over-ripeness. Molds on berries should warn you of decay.

Once you have bought a box of berries, it's a good idea to go through the lot and pick out any soft or moldy ones. Don't wash berries until just before you serve or cook them. For wet berries spoil twice as quickly as dry ones. Food specialists say that there should be as much circulation of air as possible around berries after they are picked. And they should be kept in a cool place. A friend of mine puts her berries into a colander as she looks them over and then sets the colander into the refrigerator.

All of the berry family are good sources of vitamins. Blackberries are good sources of vitamin A. Currants, gooseberries, and raspberries are all excellent sources of vitamin C.



You ask a dozen people what's the best way to eat berries and you'll probably get a dozen different answers. My young nephew would say to pop them into your mouth - right off the bush. I myself would vote for them chilled and served with sugar and cream. A neighbor of mine almost waxes poetic over berry pies.

And I'll admit that a good berry pie is delicious to eat and hard to make, so that when you do achieve one you've good reason to wax poetic. And by a good berry pie I mean one that hasn't overflowed and covered the oven floor with burned juice, and one where the pie crust is not soaked, and where the berries are nice.

I'll tell you how this neighbor of mine makes her delicious berry pies. She bakes the undercrust first - not clear done, though - just until it has started to brown. And of course since she wants to avoid a soaked pie crust, she can not prick that crust to keep it from getting puffed spots. Instead she lays another pie tin right onto that crust all the time she is baking it.

Her next move is with the berries. She heats them about 3 minutes, just long enough to get the juice nicely started, then she pours off that juice and as soon as it is cool enough thickens it slightly. For her thickening she uses cornstarch if the fruit is not too acid. But for very acid fruits she has to use flour. If she is using elderberry or huckleberry for her pie she adds a little lemon juice or vinegar to give the needed tartness. Then she puts the berries back into the hot thickened juice and puts that mixture into the pie crust.

Of course she makes a deep pie crust to hold in the juice. But she has another trick to prevent overflows, that I think is mighty clever. She sets into the middle of the pie 2 or 3 sticks of uncooked macaroni. You know - the old fashioned kind that has a big hole in it. The juice will bubble up into those funnels instead of over the edge of the pie crust. When the pie is done you take out the macaroni.

Other people like their berries best in muffins or cakes. Especially if the berries happen to be blueberries or huckleberries! And have you ever tried them in baked or steamed puddings? Some berries are fine in baked dumplings - blackberries for instance.

And there are always the jams. If you dislike the seeds in your jam, it's a simple matter to remove them. That is if you do the seed removing before you add sugar! Cooking in sugar hardens those seeds so that it is almost impossible to get them out. If you want a seedless jam, boil the fruit a few minutes, then put it through a fine sieve before you ever weigh the fruit to find out how much sugar it will take.

You might experiment with mixtures of berries in jam. Currants and red raspberries make a delicious combination. Then there are the jellies - practically all berries make excellent jelly if taken at the right stage of maturity.

You'll have plenty of chances to try out all these berry dishes. For as I said a few minutes ago - all signs point to a fine berry summer!

